

# Rating The Packers : Week 17 at Bears

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*By Bob McGinn Posted: Jan. 5, 2020*

Over the next two weeks, analysts galore will be touting the Packers' home-field advantage in the NFL playoffs.

They'll make a trip to Green Bay in January akin to a double-molar extraction or a wait in line for the COVID-19 vaccination. Lambeau Field will be portrayed as an icicle-laden house of horrors where visiting teams go to die.

If coach Matt LaFleur is smart, and his remarkable 27-7 record suggests he most certainly is, he'll give his players and coaches a history lesson about the five Packers' playoff teams over the past two decades that found out they were anything but invincible on their so-called frozen tundra. Wide receiver Davante Adams, who missed by one year the Packers' last defeat at home in the playoffs, went on and on Sunday after the regular-season finale in Chicago about what he regards as their tremendous advantage at Lambeau Field.

"It's a world of difference," Adams said. "People play different, people act different, they talk different, everything (is different) coming through Lambeau.

"You can come in and try to bark and be barefoot pregame, shirt off, and do whatever you want to do, but at the end of the day, it's a beast playing in that snow. Just being in that environment, it takes people's confidence away.

"I'd love to see challenges obviously, but just knowing that it's going to make it that much easier for us ... it's not going to be easy, but it gives us a tremendous amount of confidence knowing we're at home. And from what I've seen in the past, it's taken that confidence away from our opponents. We've just got to make sure we handle everything we've got to do in Lambeau."

For 63 years, from 1939 until 2002, the Packers were unbeatable in Wisconsin during the playoffs. Under coaches Curly Lambeau (1-0), Vince Lombardi (5-0), Bart Starr (1-0), Mike Holmgren (5-0) and Mike Sherman (1-0), the Packers were a perfect 13-0.

Then a young, scrambling quarterback by the name of Michael Vick ran the Packers silly on a snowy, postcard-pretty night in January 2003. The Falcons were the first to win a postseason game in Wisconsin, and in the next decade the Vikings, the Giants, the Giants again and, finally, the 49ers destroyed the myth of home-field superiority in Green Bay.

Green Bay was favored by a touchdown in four of those five games and still was upended. It must be noted that the Packers also have won six playoff games at home since the Atlanta defeat, but it also bears mention that in each of those games they were favored from between 4 ½ to 11 points. Only two players on the current active roster, quarterback Aaron Rodgers and kicker Mason Crosby, were part of playoff defeats at Lambeau Field. Maybe they can impart their memories of some of those

games, especially when the Giants – in their white shirts with the blood-red numerals – took over like they owned the place.

“Obviously, the weather is a big factor, big helper for us in Green Bay,” Rodgers said Sunday. “Different year so the home-field advantage might not mean exactly the same as years past (because) the home-field crowd can make a difference at certain times in the game. We know the weather issues in these months so we’ll definitely be hoping for some cold, frigid temperatures in a couple of weeks.”

The Packers finished 7-1 at home even though they never played before more than a few hundred spectators. In a stunning reversal of form, however, the road teams in the NFL actually had a better record (128-127-1) in 2020.

Tom Brady, the quarterback of the fifth-seeded Buccaneers, on Sunday said, “To do anything now, you’ve got to earn it. That’s what it comes down to – who earns it, who puts the preparation in and who goes out and executes when the pressure is on.”

Only two of the Packers’ 13 victories came over teams with winning records: the Saints and the Titans. Largely because AFC teams enjoyed a 35-28-1 record against NFC teams this season, the Packers could benefit from a less rigorous road to the Super Bowl through the NFC.

Here’s a brief look at the Packers’ five playoff losses at Lambeau Field that, to this day, some of their diehard fans will never forget.

#### **January 4, 2003, NFC wild-card game: Falcons 27, Packers 7**

Green Bay was favored by 6 ½ points. Light snow fell from the second quarter on. It was 31 degrees at kickoff with winds of 4 mph. The Packers entered without four starters due to injury and then lost five more during the game. Michael Vick scrambled for 64 yards, avoiding at least three sacks with breathtaking daring. Green Bay turned the ball over five times. Safety Matt Bowen was responsible for a blocked punt that the Falcons recovered for a touchdown and a 14-0 lead in the second quarter. Dome-stadium teams such as the Falcons had been 3-17 since 1990 in playoff games played outside. Guard Marco Rivera: “This one hurts. This one is at home. This is history.”

Coach Mike Sherman: “To say I’m disappointed is the biggest understatement I could ever make. No, I didn’t see something like this coming.”

Les Snead, the Falcons’ director of pro personnel: “We got lucky. It’s just like a Friday night of high school football somewhere in Alabama.”

Wide receiver Shawn Jefferson: “Hey, I’m just calling a spade a spade. We came out here and dominated them in every respect. To come up here and kick their butts was great.”

#### **January 9, 2005, NFC wild-card game: Vikings 31, Packers 17**

Green Bay was favored by 6 ½. It was 26 degrees at kickoff. Brett Favre threw four interceptions and his Minnesota counterpart, Daunte Culpepper, threw for 284 yards and four touchdowns. Randy Moss, who caught two for scores, pretended to pull down his pants and moon the crowd after his 20-yard TD.

The Vikings, an 8-8 team, had been 2-20 in their last 22 games outside. Five days later, team president Bob Harlan stripped Sherman of his GM duties.

Tackle Mark Tauscher: "It's embarrassing. The legacy and tradition that a lot of guys have put forward here before we were here, it feels like we took off a little of their luster. What good does it do you to have a division title? We were incredibly confident."

Culpepper: "It was our biggest rival, and it was a playoff game. Pretty much everybody said we couldn't do it, and we just pulled together. We never bought into the negativity."

Safety Darren Sharper: "They came in and played with more of a sense of urgency than we did."

### **January 20, 2008, NFC Championship Game: Giants 23, Packers 20 (OT)**

Green Bay was favored by 7 ½. This was the Packers' worst upset loss since the 32nd Super Bowl. It was minus-1 degree with a wind-chill index of minus-23, the second coldest game in recorded Packers' history. The Giants outgained the Packers on the ground, 134-28, and amassed a 17 ½-minute margin in time of possession. After the Packers won the coin toss in overtime, Brett Favre threw a deep sideline pass against a blitz that was intercepted by Corey Webster. Three plays later, Lawrence Tynes kicked a field goal of 47 yards.

GM Ted Thompson: "All the plans and all the hopes we had are out the window. It's just shocking to your system. You go along winning and you're planning for the next thing and all of a sudden – boom. It's over. It's a shame. I certainly didn't think we played our best, and the Giants played very well."

Nose tackle Ryan Pickett: "You're devastated. Somebody celebrating on your field. We thought we were the better team."

Coach Mike McCarthy: "We put ourselves in position and had home field in the NFC Championship Game. But we didn't finish the race. It's a tough lesson to learn, especially in front of our home crowd."

Giants defensive end Michael Strahan: "It (the weather) really wasn't a factor at all."

Offensive coordinator Joe Philbin: "We're shocked we didn't win. When you're this close and have this type of opportunity, it hurts pretty bad."

### **January 15, 2012, NFC Divisional game: Giants 37, Packers 20**

Green Bay was favored by 7 1/2. It was 31 degrees. With 3 minutes left, more than half the crowd of 72,080 had departed. In the 22 years of playoff seeding, the Packers became the 13th of the 44 top-seeded teams to lose their opening game. Green Bay, the defending Super Bowl champion, had won 21 of its previous 22 games. Eli Manning orchestrated another upset, passing for 330 yards and three touchdowns. Ryan Grant, John Kuhn and Aaron Rodgers lost fumbles to set up 10 of New York's points. Tight end Jermichael Finley, on the timing of the passing game: "It was the worst I've seen."

Nose tackle B.J. Raji: "Those guys (the Giants) were real confident coming in here and they were able to (back up) a lot of the things they said. They've got great playmakers, particularly on the edges. We got some good pressure (on Manning) and they still made plays. Sometimes players just outplay you."

Pickett: "It's a failed season. The reason we played was the Super Bowl."

Rodgers: "This team, this organization, this fan base expects championships."

### **January 5, 2014, NFC wild-card game: 49ers 23, Packers 20**

San Francisco was favored by 3. It was 5 degrees. Phil Dawson's 33-yard field goal as time expired was the difference. Colin Kaepernick directed a 14-play, 65-yard drive in the last 5 minutes to set up the kick. The fourth-seeded Packers were 8-7-1 after Rodgers missed Games 9-15 with a broken collarbone. The fifth-seeded 49ers had a 12-4 season. Rodgers accounted for 188 yards of total offense compared to Kaepernick's 325, including 98 on the ground.

Pickett: "That's all she wrote. We couldn't get off the field."

49ers tight end Vernon Davis: "True winners rise to the occasion. When no one is open, Kaepernick is going to step up in the pocket and make a play. He will do everything that he possibly can do to get yards."

Running back Eddie Lacy: "It's devastating. We battled back. We played our hearts out. We left it all on the field. And for us to come up that short – it's devastating to us."

Rodgers: "I think a lot of us felt with the way things had gone the last four or five weeks that there was something special about this year, and everything might be aligning right for us to make a run. So I'm very disappointed. Personally, it's frustrating not to play your best game."

On Monday, Kansas City's Andy Reid, the coach of the top-seeded team in the AFC, said playoff football means a heightened level of competition from every opponent.

"Now it's important that you just don't take it for granted that, 'Oh yeah, we're going to up our game, too,'" said Reid. "No, you got to work at it and bust your tail and dedicate yourself. Be selfless and humble."

Here is a rating of the Packers (13-3) in their 35-16 victory over the Bears (8-8), who made the NFC field as the No. 7 seed. Five footballs are the maximum, one-half football is the minimum.

The three stars of the game were: **1. Adrian Amos. 2. Chandon Sullivan. 3. Lucas Patrick.** As a team, the Packers received four footballs.

### **Receivers (3 ½)**

What to make of Marquez Valdes-Scantling? On the Packers' second snap, he smartly sat down in a zone as Aaron Rodgers scrambled and made a 15-yard reception. In the second quarter, defensive coordinator Chuck Pagano banked on a four-man pressure that included a defensive back would get home. When it didn't, the risky scheme left WLB Danny Trevathan one-on-one in the vacant middle of the field against MVS, and the result was a 72-yard touchdown. In the third quarter, the Bears doubled Davante Adams and Robert Tonyan leaving nickel back Duke Shelley in man coverage on MVS. That was no contest, with MVS in the clear on the same right-to-left post pattern. This time, he dropped what would have been a 53-yard TD. Chalk it up to a loss of concentration. It was his seventh drop of the season and second sure TD. Matt LaFleur didn't bench MVS, who played 22 of the 46 possible snaps on offense. He also didn't stop using Tavon Austin on offense after his fumble returning a punt. Unlike Mike Holmgren, LaFleur doesn't believe in putting insecure ball handlers in mothballs. Austin went in jet motion on four of his five snaps. The Bears were without RC Jaylon Johnson (shoulder), the best rookie defensive player in the NFC North, and veteran nickel back Buster Skrine (concussion). Shelley, all 5 foot 8 ½ of him, and rookie Kindle Vildor replaced them. Pagano used LC Kyle Fuller to

travel with Adams (41) when he was wide regardless of side, and with considerable safety help didn't allow Adams a reception until the 6-yard slant for a closing TD. Later, the Packers began placing Adams in the slot to escape Fuller and the extra coverage. It was from inside that he drew a 16-yard interference penalty on Shelley to convert a fourth and 3. Adams' second major penalty in two weeks was an unnecessary block in the back of Shelley. Although Allen Lazard (36) is more than willing to take on big-boy blocking chores, his results need to become more consistent. Equanimeous St. Brown (15) had a quiet day. Tonyan (28) crossed Shelley's face in the end zone and separated nicely for a 3-yard TD. Mercedes Lewis (21) failed to beat WLB Josh Woods on an out-and-up in the end zone. Jace Sternberger was back after missing three games with a concussion but the Packers stayed with Dominique Dafney as the No. 3 tight end. Sternberger would seem to run faster than Dafney but isn't as physical blocking or playing special teams. He was inactive.

### **Offensive Line (4)**

Even by NFL standards, Akiem Hicks is a scary dude. He's massive, athletic, gung ho and loves to bellow/talk trash. The only game that Hicks missed this season was Green Bay on Nov. 29 with a concussion. Unlike the vast majority of defensive linemen in today's game, Hicks is stationary. With rare exception, he hunkers down on the left side, usually against the right guard. Enter Lucas Patrick, whose spot in the lineup was cemented Thursday when [David Bakhtiari blew out his knee in practice](#). Patrick has a free agent-looking build. Next to Hicks, he pales in comparison. Theirs was a battle royal, a Pro Bowl talent against a proud overachiever. Hicks did have two knockdowns, but the first came on a stunt against Corey Linsley and Elgton Jenkins and the second on a spin move against Linsley. Against Patrick, he didn't have a pressure. Patrick got ole'd a few times, missing Hicks badly, but the ball was out. Hicks kept trying to power rush but in most cases, Patrick would plant his anchor a yard or two before arriving in Aaron Rodgers' lap. As usual, Patrick was his pesty self. In the first half, he enraged Hicks with a light shove when the ball carrier was down 10 yards away. Patrick's crowning achievement came in at the end when he caved Hicks inside by himself enabling Jamaal Williams to cut outside for 14 yards. When the coaches decided to start Billy Turner for Bakhtiari at left tackle, it left Rick Wagner as the right tackle facing Khalil Mack. Wagner had knee problems in Detroit last season and left early last week against the Titans with a knee injury. On the seventh snap Sunday, OLB Robert Quinn rolled into the back of Wagner's left knee. Even though it was in the middle of a possession, he stayed in the lineup. Most impressively, Wagner didn't allow a pressure and had one "bad" run. Quinn, a 10-year veteran, had been a major disappointment in Chicago until Sunday when he beat Turner for two knockdowns and a penalty-inducing hurry. In all, Turner gave up 5 ½ of the eight pressures charged to the line. The thought was Bakhtiari's pass-protection skills wouldn't be a critical loss until the next game with a fast track, which would be the Super Bowl in Tampa if the Packers were to advance. But Turner's struggles at Soldier Field might leave him vulnerable at Lambeau Field, too. Linsley had at least four negative plays, including two "bad" runs and 1 ½ pressures. Jenkins was adequate.

### **Quarterbacks (4)**

This was the 12th game in which Aaron Rodgers didn't fumble. He hasn't been hit hard often this season so his one-sack, five-knockdown afternoon represented considerable punishment. Of his four fumbles in 2020, two came on center exchanges with mixed responsibility and another on a toss that was Aaron Jones' fault. His only legitimate lost fumble was on a sack against Minnesota in Game 7. His diligent professionalism played a leading role in why the Packers had the NFL's fewest giveaways with 11. His best play came on the first series, a third and 8 with the Bears ahead, 7-0. Robert Quinn blew

around Billy Turner. Rodgers sensed trouble, thought about scrambling for a split-second and then got the ball out fast to Aaron Jones for a 15-yard check-down just as Quinn rammed into him. On the 72-yard TD strike to Marquez Valdes-Scantling, Rodgers threw a 30-yard laser that cut through the snow and wind with deadly accuracy. His day was made much easier when WLB Roquan Smith, one of the NFC North's top two defensive players this season, left after nine snaps with an elbow injury. Also, the Bears were without Jaylon Johnson and Buster Skrine, two of their top three cornerbacks. With Chicago lacking cover people, Matt LaFleur used an empty formation on 21.7 percent of the snaps, a season-high, to spread them out. None of Rodgers' four TD passes were especially taxing. Two came from empty sets. MVS dropped an easy touchdown, but three of Rodgers' five incompletions easily could have been intercepted. Those were bad throws and/or decisions but FS Eddie Jackson, CB Kindle Vildor and OLB Barkevious Mingo didn't make him pay.

### **Running Backs (4 ½)**

Week after week, Aaron Jones (32) takes a frightful pounding. He crashes wherever he crashes, pinballing and spinning into and away from collisions with big people trying to knock his block off. Matt LaFleur has taken a prudent approach by limiting Jones to 51.8 percent playing time. He has 248 touches and his 1,459 yards from scrimmage ranked seventh in the NFL. There was no play bigger Sunday than his ability to gain 15 yards on a third-and-8 checkdown in the first series. He broke three tackles, including two before the marker. His stiff-arm of WLB Roquan Smith was sublime. Some players stop their feet using stiff-arms, but Jones can keep his moving. Two of his four receptions came on jet motion to the sideline from a two-back set. Jamaal Williams (12) and AJ Dillon (five) had to be content with the scraps in merely a 46-play day. It looked like an extremely hard-hitting affair, and with 26 yards in five carries, Williams was, as always, directly in the mix. After a late run for 6 in which he refused to go down, Williams drew taps of respect from DE Brent Urban and CB Kyle Fuller. Dominique Dafney (13) looked anything like a free-agent slug on the sharp stutter move that he used to get behind WLB Josh Woods for a 13-yard TD catch. For the first time, LaFleur didn't use him at fullback at all.

### **Defensive Line (4)**

The Bears were without LG-C James Daniels and RT Bobby Massie; the Packers didn't have Kingsley Keke (concussion). David Montgomery and two other backs did enough (27 carries, 86 yards) to help the Bears win the time of possession by 11 minutes. That enabled the underdogs to have a chance to win entering the fourth quarter. The Packers could feel good about the Bears' 3.2 average and the fact the longest rush by a back was 8 yards. Kenny Clark, who played 63 of the 75 possible snaps on defense, was getting neutralized on the Bears' 60-yard TD drive to open the game. After that, he often was dominant against the run. RG Alex Bars, a free agent, wasn't strong enough to hang with Clark. On four occasions Clark shed him and the net gain of the plays was 4 yards. He was playing with leverage, splitting double-teams and getting off blocks. Clark also had the only hurry by a defensive lineman. Dean Lowry (53) didn't have one of his better days. Besides getting displaced several times by double-teams, he had a chance to nail Montgomery on an early third and 3 but froze and the opportunity was lost. Tyler Lancaster (24) lost some playing time to [Damon Harrison \(12\), the ex-Seahawk who arrived on waivers at mid-week](#). The coaches thought enough of "Snacks" that he was waved into the fray just seven plays in. He turned the wrong way looking for the ball in a disquieting debut, but after that did his job. Bars dumped him on the ground for a 6-yard gain. Later, Harrison largely was responsible for why two runs went for just 1 yard when the Bears were threatening. At times, he lined up so close to the line that C Sam Mustipher undoubtedly could smell his breath.

### **Linebackers (3 ½)**

When the teams met in Game 11, Christian Kirksey played all 68 snaps and had one of his poorest performances. With Krys Barnes (59) returning from COVID-19 in Game 13, Kirksey's playing time has gone way down just as his production has gone way up. Besides making three strong tackles, Kirksey (35) showed his savvy by registering the Packers' only sack. The Bears used misdirection to influence the linebacker, and if it had been wildly undisciplined Kamal Martin (11), the play probably would have been successful. Kirksey, however, stayed home and, when TE Jimmy Graham blocked Za'Darius Smith instead of him, surged forward and took down Mitchell Trubisky. Barnes has enough size to stay alive, enough speed to reach the sideline and enough instinct to find the ball. He missed two tackles in coverage but did well containing David Montgomery. The main reason Rashan Gary (30) is playing fewer snaps would be the injuries that have been dogging him. He didn't play until the seventh snap and never saw the field on the last nine snaps. Nevertheless, Gary made a major impact even though he didn't have a pressure. TE Cole Kmet couldn't block him. Three times on runs Gary shoved off the rookie and the net gain was no yards. On his first three snaps, he shed the tight end, made a tackle in long pursuit and was credited with a partial tackle for a loss. Later, on a third and 1, he closed down the line and halted Montgomery short of the marker. Once again, Gary's chase was so much better than that of Za'Darius (66). The Bears might have worn out Za'Darius with all the misdirection stuff they used to minimize his impact. Za'Darius, who finished with two hurries against LT Charles Leno, is something of a front-runner. When he doesn't have success relatively early, his effort tends to slip. Preston Smith (62) cost the team a recovered fumble with an offsides penalty. Gary was deep in the backfield chasing Trubisky when Kmet fumbled on the sideline. The only reason he made the recovery was he cared enough to hustle toward the pile. The Smith's simply don't do that. Martin charged through unblocked but wasn't able to prevent Montgomery's 2-yard TD because he had his head down. Randy Ramsey (six) filled in for Gary on the late rush; Oren Burks (one) got in on a goal-line situation.

### **Defensive Backs (4)**

Adrian Amos (75) was terrific against his old team. He made a series of low, sure, strong tackles. In the final seconds, Mitchell Trubisky would have scored a consolation touchdown on a 17-yard scramble but Amos wouldn't take the fake and wrestled him down at the 4. Amos accosted David Montgomery on a pass in the flat, ripped the ball out and recovered at the Chicago 46 only to have the play brought back by Preston Smith's penalty. When WR Darnell Mooney broke three tackles along the sideline, Amos arrived to end things. Mooney fumbled after the stiff shot but was out of bounds. Amos finally recorded a takeaway showing sure hands on an interception off the deep hash. His 24-yard return was the team's longest of the season. Darnell Savage (75) is a dangerous threat in short-yardage situations. He shot off the edge to stop a third and 1 and came close on a goal-line run. When the Packers blitzed Chandon Sullivan (65) on fourth and 3, Savage was way too far off the line on the 7-yard pass in front of him to Anthony Miller. On the 53-yard bomb to Mooney, the Bears got Savage right where they wanted him: as the single deep safety. He squatted on the route, misjudged Mooney's blazing speed and wasn't fast enough to recover. Jerry Gray, the first-year secondary coach, probably deserves plaudits for the way Sullivan and Jaire Alexander (74) have played bubble screens. On Sunday, Sullivan stopped one for a 2-yard gain. Battling back from an early leg injury, Sullivan made plays all over the field. He continued tackling well in the flat. With the Bears facing fourth and 1 at the Green Bay 25 trailing by five points early in the fourth quarter, Trubisky sprinted out toward Sullivan and threw to

Allen Robinson at the marker. That's an extremely difficult route to defend but Sullivan got there. He should have intercepted the ball, but the Packers were just thrilled to get the game-changing stop. Alexander forced Cole Kmet to fumble, blanketed Javon Wims on an on-target takeoff route and wrapped up Jimmy Graham one yard short of a consolation TD as time expired. With the Packers concentrating coverage on Robinson, the Bears worked other receivers in the sector of Kevin King (74). King broke up two passes, dropped an interception and had good coverage on a 23-yard fade to Robinson. His tackling was up and down. Will Redmond (35) did OK as the dime safety.

### **Kickers (4)**

It's unclear if Mason Crosby was coached to go for the right corner on the opening kickoff. The great Cordarrelle Patterson required a week's worth of emphasis. In a controversial replay decision, his kick was ruled out of bounds so the Bears started at the 40. After that, Crosby showed his leg strength on a 32-degree afternoon by swinging away and generating three touchbacks on his final five attempts. His six-kick averages were 69 yards and 3.99 seconds of hang time. JK Scott hit two exceptionally high punts, averaging 43.5 (gross and net) and 5.27 hang time.

### **Special Teams (2 ½)**

The Packers finished the regular season minus-2 in turnover differential on special teams when Tavon Austin fumbled on a punt return. It was his 23rd fumble since entering the league in 2013, one reason why his career appeared dead-ended not long ago. TE Demetrius Harris beat the block of Randy Ramsey and dislodged the ball, which Austin appeared to be carrying a little too loosely in his left arm. If Matt LaFleur sticks with Austin, he must place ball security above all else. He's too old and too small to think he can avoid fumbling without having two arms on the ball in traffic. Malik Taylor has been operating in that manner for about a month, averaging just 18.6 but holding onto the ball. Cordarrelle Patterson returned two of the six kickoffs, averaging 26.5 but advancing just to the 20 and 29. Dominique Dafney delivered one of the biggest hits all season with one solo tackle, and Taylor authored another. The snap leaders, all with 18, were Oren Burks, Will Redmond, Ty Summers and Ramsey.